

US alcohol consumption: why the alarming polls don't tell the whole truth

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Recent polls on US alcohol moderation are “noise,” not “behavior.” The market’s real challenge isn’t moderation but a demographic shift: aging Boomers are drinking less, and smaller new generations, like Gen Z, are consuming differently (e.g., RTDs, gaming events). The wine industry must innovate to engage these new consumers where they are.

Every time a new poll on alcohol consumption comes out of the United States, a conditioned reflex kicks in here in the wine world: fear. It's useless to hide it.

When your main market by value starts talking persistently about moderation, when 53% of Americans declare that even a

couple of glasses a day are bad for your health, as emerged from the latest Gallup report, **thoughts immediately turn to tariffs, health campaigns, and that nightmare scenario in which our most important outlet collapses on us at any moment.**

But, as a daily observer of market dynamics, I have learned a fundamental lesson: there is a huge difference between what people say and what they actually do. And it is precisely in this difference that the key to interpreting the data coming from the USA without panic is hidden. The analysis by an expert like Mitch Louch, someone who has studied the American market from within giants like Anheuser-Busch and Beam Suntory, goes exactly in this direction. **Polls, Louch says, are “noise,” not “behavior”.**

They reflect the media echo of the moment, the concern for health that dominates the public debate, but they do not accurately photograph purchasing choices. The real game is played on another field: that of mathematics and demographics.

The point is not that people are drinking less, but that fewer people are drinking. The problem, as Louch defines it, is an inescapable demographic “headwind.” The Baby Boomer generation, the one that drove consumption for decades, is aging and, physiologically, reducing its consumption occasions. Meanwhile, the **young people turning 21 are not numerous enough to replace them.**

This is a fact, not an opinion. The average per capita spending, by the way, has not collapsed; it is simply being redistributed over a demographically different and smaller consumer base. And the young people? **Gen Z is not saying goodbye to alcohol.** It is just changing the rules of the game. You won’t find them “chugging pitchers at the bar” anymore.

Their places of consumption are different: sporting events, gaming arenas, evenings at home where Ready-to-Drinks are exploding. This is not a sign of decline, but of evolution. An

evolution that the big beer and spirit companies have already intercepted, investing massively in these new contexts. And what about us in the wine industry? Louch defines us as being in a “demographically-induced pause.”

Perhaps this is the truth. We are a sector that, by tradition, targets a more mature consumer and that, let's admit it, has struggled to produce real disruptive innovations in recent years. So, no, this is not the beginning of the end for the American market. It is, more simply, the beginning of a new chapter, governed by different consumers with different habits.

The real threat is not the Gallup poll, but the risk of remaining still, frightened by background “noise,” while the world of real consumption rapidly moves elsewhere. The challenge is not to convince Americans to drink more, but to understand where and how they will drink tomorrow. And to be ready for it.

Key points

1. Polls reflect media “noise,” not **actual consumer behavior**.
2. The key issue is a **demographic headwind**: aging Boomers, fewer new drinkers.
3. Gen Z is **not abstaining** but changing consumption venues and habits.
4. The wine industry is in a “**demographically-induced pause**” and lacks disruption.
5. The challenge is **understanding where and how** future consumption will happen.

